



Lenten  
Devotions  
Inspired by  
Handel's  
Oratorio  
Messiah

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## March 15

Isaiah 53:8;

Psalms 16:10

He was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgressions of Thy people was He stricken. But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell; nor didst Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption.

Matthew records that the Pharisees sought a sign from Jesus (Mt 12:38). He responded that the only sign to be given would be the sign of Jonah: as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth. If Jesus died on Friday afternoon and rose on Sunday morning, He was only in the tomb two nights (Friday and Saturday) and only one part day (Friday) and one full day (Saturday). Jesus rose at or before sunrise on Sunday (Lk 24:1).

Either Jesus was wrong—an impossibility of the perfect Son of God—or (as is the case) the “heart of the earth” does not specifically mean “in the grave.” God proclaimed to Adam, “From dust you are and to dust you shall return.” The consequence of sin is eternal death. The “heart of the earth” is eternal death, not simply a body lying in the ground. When did Jesus endure the death of hell? When He was forsaken by the Father on the cross of Calvary. Indeed, even before Jesus had His hands and feet nailed to those wood planks, He was already suffering under the weight of the sin placed upon Him (He sweated blood in the Garden). The three day and nights began on the day (Thursday) the Lamb was prepared for sacrifice (Lk 22:7). This was when Jesus was “cut off from the land of the living.” Yet the Father did not let His Holy One see corruption. On the third day, Jesus destroyed the power of the tomb, ensuring that neither shall we see corruption.

Rev. William Sabol

## Prayer

*Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle; Sing the ending of the fray. Now above the cross, the trophy, Sound the loud triumphant lay; Tell how Christ, the world's redeemer, As a victim won the day. Amen (LSB 454:1)*

## March 20

LSB 430

My song is love unknown, My Savior's love to me, Love to the loveless shown That they might lovely be. Oh who am I That for my sake My Lord should take frail flesh and die?

Ironically, when we sing the words “my song is love unknown,” it is not *our* song we are singing about, and it is not *unknown*. This is our Savior's song of life. We know this song because we hear it sung in His Word.

The Singer of life is put to death. He sings of love to a loveless people who are tone deaf, so that they may sing lovely tunes. The people who hear His song and cheer also sing out to crucify Him. When He sings healing, sight, and new life into people this affronts the ears of other hearers who rise up against Him. The one who came to save is murdered, while a murderer is saved. The people whom He created and chose to be His people reject Him and call His perfect harmony dissonance.

Now that I have said this is not *our* song and is not *unknown*, I'll do the good Lutheran thing and say that it *is our* song and is largely *unknown* by us. This song has been sung into us by our Savior through His Holy Spirit. His song is our song by faith. Our Savior sings His song of life through you and me. Every note of our lives is woven into His song of life. The true awe and mystery of His song of life is so vast and so rich that, even singing it every minute of every day, we only truly know a few measures. He flawlessly joins the notes of every one of His singers into His song of life. We are a part of His great song of life that sings life into you, me and all who believe. We sing a lovely song in and through Him.

By Rev. Matthew Brackman

## Prayer

*May Your song of life, O Lord, be as familiar to us as the chorus of the Messiah. Let it be sung in and through us. Let us hear, live and sing Your song every day. Amen.*

## March 19

St. Joseph, Guardian of our Lord

Matthew 1:24-25

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Having two adopted children has opened me to understand Christianity in so many new ways. It has made me aware, to give just one example, of the importance many people still place on biological family ties. Adopted parents get to hear the whole panoply of crazy questions: “Do you miss not having your own child?” “Do you know their real mother or father?” “But your two girls aren’t real sisters, right?”

The importance we attach to biological ties is part of what makes the Gospel so difficult to preach in our world. We are not “naturally” God’s children, any more than my daughters are “naturally” mine. That is a tough pill for many to swallow, who have grown up hearing that God is our Father and loves everyone, divorced from any mention of Christ, His cross, or faith in Him. We are God’s children by fiat, by judicial declaration made possible by the incarnation and death of God’s Son, Jesus.

It may also explain why it is awkward for Christians to talk about Joseph as Jesus’ “father.” Well, you know, Joseph was His guardian, His “stepfather,” etc. His “real” Father was in Heaven. Yes, by nature, Jesus’ father was God the Father. But God chose Joseph to serve the earthly function, in the same way that we have both a Father in heaven and earthly fathers. We might even say the Father was Jesus’ birth father, and Joseph his adopted father.

But wouldn’t that imply that the Father “gave Jesus up” for adoption? Consider that the term preferred in adoption circles is “made an adoption plan.” Isn’t that precisely what the Father did for Jesus—made a plan for Him to have an earthly dad? God planned for Joseph to be part of His work in saving the human race from sin through His Son.

By Rev. Charles St Onge

## Prayer

*Gracious Father, we are your adopted children through Christ Jesus. We give thanks today for Joseph, part of your plan to save us from sin and death and grant us eternal life.*

## March 16

Psalms 24:7-10

Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in! Who is the King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is the King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory.

What a beautiful psalm! And what a wondrous job Handel did, catching the joyous processional of this psalm. Listening to Handel’s version, you find yourself caught up, as if with Israel when they first marched the Ark of the Covenant into the Sanctuary on Zion. The tenors and basses, like the sons of Aaron, ask, “Who is the King of Glory?” And, as the daughters of Israel did in response, the women respond, “The LORD strong and mighty.”

“The King of Glory” is not a term used for the God of Israel anywhere else in the Bible. So what is being asked is probably akin to “Who is the greatest boxer of all time?” “It’s that guy coming to the ring right now!” In other words, this is not a psalm for quiet meditation. This is a psalm for a roaring crowd. And if you happen to be, like me, alone at the moment, then lift up your eyes of faith and see the hosts of our Lord, who join with us whenever we pray.

Ps 24 begins (before Handel’s libretto picks it up) by saying, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.” The glory of this psalm is how it begins with the God of Israel owning the entirety of entirety, but it moves to God coming to us right now.

What else can you do in response to this marvelous honor but join Handel, join the angels, join the apostles and prophets, the band of martyrs, indeed the entire church, and praise the LORD?

As the church, we take this psalm up twice in the church year, first in Advent, when we began this devotion series. We will hear it again soon, on Palm Sunday, when we answer the question, “Who is the King of Glory?” with the answer, “He is Christ Jesus, the Lord!”

By Rev. Daniel Guagenti

## Prayer

*The company of angels Is praising You on high, And we with all creation In chorus make reply. All glory, laud, and honor To You, Redeemer, King, To whom the lips of children Made sweet hosannas ring. Amen. (LSB 442:2)*

## Mar ch 17

Hebrews 1:5-6

Unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee? Let all the angels of God worship Him.

Probably no chapter in the New Testament is so rich in asserting the deity of Christ as Hebrews, chapter 1. He is identified as the Creator (v. 2), the “exact imprint of [God’s] nature (v. 3), the Upholder of the Universe (v. 3), addressed as “O God” (v. 8), and identified as Creator and Lord (v. 10). But, perhaps, the greatest attestation of His deity is in v. 6 when the Father says, “Let all the angels of God worship Him.” That the Father should give such a command can only mean that Christ is God. Yes, the Son is God.

This is something we cannot take lightly. You see, if the enfleshed Son is not truly God, then His sinless life could not be imputed to *all* sinners, past, present, and future. Moreover, if He is not God-in-the flesh, then His sacrifice on the cross would not be sufficient to cover all humanity’s sins. In the Nicene Creed, we confess the deity of Christ, saying that He is “of one substance with the Father.” Oh what a comfort it is to rest our salvation in the person and work of the Lamb!

The last chorus of Handel’s *Messiah* is, for me, the richest. Picking up on the language of Rev. 5:12, the choir sings “Worthy is the Lamb! Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!” Indeed, He is worthy. He dies for us, in time, that we might live with Him forever!

By Rev. David Grassley

## Prayer

*O Lord, Jesus, may we, like the angels, worship you, who with the Father and the Spirit, is one God, world without end. Amen.*

## Mar ch 18

Psalms 68:18

Thou art gone up on high, Thou hast led captivity captive and received gifts for men; yea, even for Thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

King David’s present joy or suffering is often a Prophecy of the future, as it is in this psalm. King David is jubilant about the return of the Ark of the Covenant to the sanctuary. The battle has been won! God is victorious. The spoils of war will be divided. And so we celebrate with David the Lord’s victory. In prophecy, he looks forward to the battle that is won on the cross, to the return of Jesus to heaven and the distribution of gifts.

Jesus does not return alone but rather “leading a host of captives.” We are the captives, the rebellious. And indeed we were captive to sin. We do not do the very thing we want to do. We may continue to be captive to worry or guilt or anger.

In Jesus’ battle, we are the prisoners and captives that were rescued. In Eph 4:8 it says, “When He ascended on high He led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.” God does not take us as slaves, as was the practice after battle in David’s time. He rescues us and He gives us gifts.

So what are our gifts? Peter reveals the answer in his first sermon in Acts 2:33, “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.” Each of us has been given gifts. These gifts change our chains of worry to patience, of guilt to peace and of anger to gentleness.

So as the children of Israel were separated from their God, we were separated from our God by our unfaithfulness. Jesus’ battle over sin, death and the devil brought us into the sanctuary of God. We received the precious gift of the Holy Spirit, imparting to us the fruit of the Spirit. All this was completed by one battle fought and won for us by our loving God.

By Rev. Andy Guagenti

## Prayer

*We thank you Father for the victory won on the cross and the pouring out of the Spirit upon us. Amen.*